

Alberta Children's Services

Strong children families communities

Alberta's Early Childhood Development Baseline Expenditure and Investments Report

In September 2000, Premier Klein and all First Ministers, except the Premier of Quebec, released a Communiqué on Early Childhood Development that set out their vision of early childhood development as an investment in the future of Canada. It reflects a long-term commitment by the federal, provincial and territorial governments to improve and expand the supports available to young children and their families. First Ministers also agreed to provide their citizens with information on how



young children and their families are currently supported by their government. This report focuses on the services to young children and their families provided by the Government of Alberta.

In 1994, the Alberta government began to implement a substantial change in the way services to Albertans were planned, delivered and reported on. Through public consultations, Albertans informed the

government that they wanted to be able to build on approaches, such as Family and Community Support Services, which plan, manage and deliver services to meet the unique needs of their local communities. The government's response included:

- establishment of 17 Regional Health Authorities (RHAs), Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB) and the Alberta Cancer Board (ACB)
- consolidation of school jurisdictions
- creation of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Boards
- establishment of 18 Child and Family Service Authorities (CFSAs)



Through these community-based authorities and boards, government has delegated responsibility and accountability to the local/regional level for assessing needs, setting priorities, developing strategies, allocating resources and delivering services within the context of the government's and individual ministry's business plans. The development and delivery of programs at the local and regional level gives each region the opportunity to create a unique mix of services that are responsive to their communities' needs.

When financial and program information is reported to government from these boards and authorities, it reflects their accountability for achieving broad outcomes within a provincial framework rather than providing detailed information on individual programs and expenditures for specific populations.

Alberta's Commitment to Children and Families

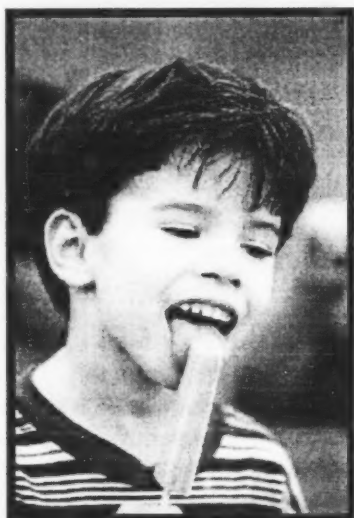
The Alberta government has a long-standing commitment to the health and well-being of its young children with emphasis on priorities, such as:

- Early childhood services (kindergarten)
- Licensed day care standards and day care staff qualifications
- Immunization and well-baby clinics
- Early intervention programs for young children with developmental delays
- Prevention of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and improved care and support of those already affected
- Home Visitation Programs



More recently, the government has strengthened its commitment by:

- Including a goal specific to children in the government business plan.
- Ensuring that individual ministry business plans include child-specific strategies to support the government's goal.
- Establishing the Ministry of Children's Services in 1999 to focus on the particular needs of children and their families.
- Establishing the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative (introduced in 1998 as Alberta Children's Initiative) as one of the government's four priority cross-ministry initiatives for 1999 to 2000, 2001 to 2002 and again for 2002 to 2003.
- Including Early Childhood Development as a major initiative under three cross-ministry initiatives: the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, the Aboriginal Policy Initiative and the Health Sustainability Initiative.



Alberta's Current Investments in Children and Families

Alberta invests significantly in programs and services for young children and their families. Ministries provide a wide range of services that support the health and development of children. Alberta has chosen the fiscal year 1998-1999 as the baseline year for the early childhood development initiative, since this was the year prior to the establishment of the new Children's Services Ministry. Since that year, significant additional initiatives for young children and their families have been introduced.

Young children require good access to health services. The Alberta Child Health Benefit was introduced in 1998-1999 to provide comprehensive coverage for prescriptions, optical, dental and ambulance services to children who live in low-income families. Government invested an additional \$2 million in comparable health benefits for children under six whose parents are students with limited resources. In 2001 to 2002, physician billings for services to children under the age of six was in excess of \$59 million.

A developmentally appropriate learning experience in kindergarten builds a foundation which prepares children for life-long learning and successful entry to grade one. Alberta has substantially increased its investment in kindergarten programs over the last few years - in



2000 to 2001 nearly \$121 million was spent in early childhood services for kindergarten students. In Alberta, 94.8% of eligible children attended 475 hours of voluntary kindergarten programs. Community Learning Councils also provide family literacy programs.

Children with special needs receive support through a variety of ministries. Resources for Children with Disabilities provides services and financial support to children with disabilities and their families. In addition, in 2000 to 2001, \$63 million was invested in services for children with disabilities, such as provision of medical equipment and supplies



through the Alberta Aids to Daily Living Program, inclusive child care and special needs educational funding for preschoolers with mild, moderate or severe disabilities.

Alberta has focused attention on prevention and early intervention for children and youth at risk. In 2000 to 2001, Children's Services invested \$27 million in initiatives including early intervention services, and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAS/FAE) prevention and early intervention programs.

Community Development, through grants and programs for recreational facilities, cultural centres and the Wild Rose Foundation, enhances the capacity of communities to provide stimulating and supportive environments in which families raise young children.

The provincial government promotes a social climate that supports families raising children. The provincial Employment Standards Code gives employees time off to care for their newborn or adopted children. Employed birth mothers are allowed to take up to one year of unpaid, job-protected leave from their current place of work. Birth fathers and adoptive

parents are eligible to take up to 37 weeks of unpaid job protected leave. These changes came into effect to parents of children born or adopted on or after December 31, 2000.

On January 1, 2001, Alberta moved to a new single rate tax system. The single tax rate of 10% applies to federally defined taxable income. The basic exemption was increased significantly, from \$7,231 to \$12,900 and the spousal exemption from \$6,140 to \$12,900. All other non-refundable credits still apply, and the provincial income tax system is fully indexed to inflation, which means most of the non-refundable credits that Alberta provides will grow with inflation, each and every year. This single tax system means that low income working families with children will pay fewer taxes and keep more of their earnings for other purposes.

Cross Ministry Cooperation for Children (ACYI)

Under the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, seven ministries work together on common goals related to the well-being of Alberta's children. The partnering ministries include: Children's Services, Health and Wellness (including the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) and the Alberta Mental Health Board), Learning, Solicitor General, Human Resources and Employment, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and Community Development. These ministries share responsibility for ensuring that government's goal "Alberta's children are well cared-for, safe, successful at learning and healthy" is achieved through innovative, integrated and collaborative work.

Alberta's Early Childhood Development Initiative

Alberta has listened to the input from parents, service providers and concerned citizens who participated in the planning for the Child and Family Service Authorities, Children's Forums, the Premier's Task Force on Children at Risk and other community-based strategies for identifying needs and priorities. One of the identified priorities under the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative is the Early Childhood Development Initiative for Alberta's youngest citizens.

The goals of Alberta's Early Childhood Development (ECD) strategy are to:

- provide a range of health, social and learning programs and services for children from preconception to age six, their parents, and families
- ensure that children get the best start in life, and
- build on the existing foundation of services and programs.

While Alberta already invests significantly in young children, this priority focus is a critical one for Alberta's future. If Alberta's future is to be a bright and prosperous one, every facet of Alberta's society and economy must recognize the importance of the early years of life.



In summary...



The Government of Alberta will continue to build on our Government's historically high level of investment and the existing infrastructure of programs and services for young children, their parents and families. Local and regional authorities and boards will work together to determine their communities' greatest needs and to focus attention on ways to ensure that services for young children and their families become better integrated over time.

Table 1 shows how Alberta's investments in Early Childhood Development has risen by over seventy two million dollars since the 1998-99 fiscal year. Enhancements will expand existing resources at the local and regional level, assisting authorities in planning for and providing expanded and improved services that will strengthen the capacity of parents and communities to meet the needs of their children and to promote optimal child development.

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**Table I – Alberta's Early Childhood Development Initiative Baseline
of Services and Expenditure Reports (0-6)
1998/1999 - 2000/2001**

Action Area (Ministry Responsible)	Fiscal Year 1998-1999	Fiscal Year 2000-2001	Incremental 1998-2001
Healthy Birth Outcomes and Enhancing Parenting Skills			
Public Health (H&W) (estimated)	\$40,950,000	\$46,200,000	\$5,250,000
Early Intervention (CS)*	\$16,990,00*	\$25,600,000*	\$8,610,000*
Alberta Child Health Benefit (AHRE)	\$1,053,896	\$4,328,985	\$3,275,089
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Initiative (CS)	\$1,020,000	\$1,216,000	\$196,000
Substance Abuse Treatment Services for Women (H&W)	\$180,400	\$180,400	\$0
Sub-Total	\$60,194,296	\$77,525,385	\$17,331,089
Promoting Optimal Early Childhood Development			
Child Care Subsidy and Integrated Child Care (CS)	\$63,770,000	\$63,875,000	\$105,000
Early Childhood Services Funding (Learning)	\$95,552,231	\$149,060,017	\$53,507,786
Sub-Total	\$159,322,231	\$212,935,017	\$53,612,786
Building Community Capacity			
FCSS - Early Child Development/Support (0-5) (CS)	\$0	\$1,378,230	\$1,378,230
Community Literacy Programs (Learning)	\$0	\$300,000	\$300,000
Sub-Total		\$1,678,230	\$1,678,230
Grand Total	\$219,516,527	\$292,138,632	\$72,622,105

*Early Intervention expenditure is inclusive of all age categories.

Legend: H&W – Health and Wellness
CS – Children's Services
AHRE – Alberta Human Resources and Employment

